

Weston Field, Weston Zoyland, Somerset

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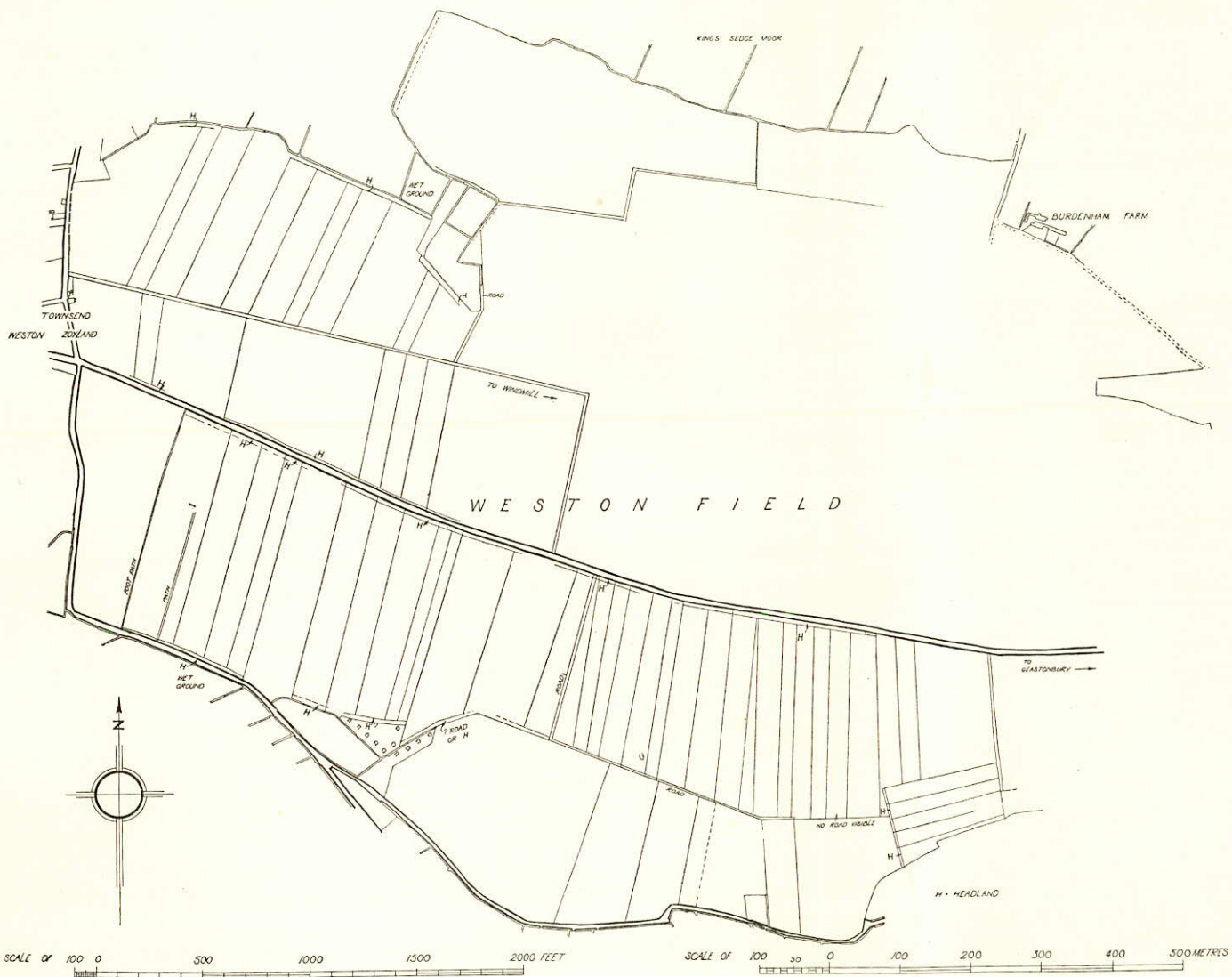
IMMEDIATELY east of the village of Weston Zoyland there is a large flat area of cultivated land, which the O.S. maps describe as Weston Field. It is roughly bisected by the road eastwards to Middlezoy, but is entirely devoid of hedges or other normal field boundaries. This has suggested that it represents one of the few remaining examples in this country of the medieval open field. Moreover, south of the road the 25" O.S. map marks by means of broken lines many divisions of this land into strips with occasional boundary stones.

An opportunity being offered to the writer to visit the area after harvest, he examined it with some care, in order to determine the exact size and character of these strips, for comparison with such features elsewhere. Dr. and Mrs. C. S. Orwin agreed that information of value might thereupon be disclosed in furtherance of the study which they have made their own.¹

It was found that very few of the boundary stones are now to be seen. Moreover, the broken lines of the O.S. map, although frequently still marking divisions between crops, are seldom marked by any other means. Occasionally they are limited by a distinct furrow or similar slight depression in the ground, but more often the ground is quite level.

Local enquiry showed that different strips often belong to different owners, so that at first sight it would appear as if a medieval style of land tenure persisted. In view, however, of the irregularity of the strips in size on land which is flat, and of the fact, already stated, that they often correspond to no visible agricultural boundary, it seems more likely that they are the product of a comparatively recent redistribution of land. Of this there should be some documentary evidence, but present conditions militate against the research necessary to find it.

¹ C. S. and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields*, Oxford, 1938.



WESTON FIELD, WESTON ZOYLAND, SOMERSET

Nevertheless, although the existing boundaries between crops are seldom of any significance, it seems likely that this land was once an open field of medieval type. Since, therefore, some of the boundaries coincide with furrows, and since other furrows were clearly visible in the stubble away from the boundaries, it was thought that useful results might accrue from a careful planning of the area. In this way it was hoped to recover the position and shape of some of the original strips, and perhaps from this evidence to reconstruct the general appearance of the field in medieval times.

On the plan (Plate V) all the visible furrows have been plotted, and all the divisions, which the O.S. map marks but which are not marked by furrows, have been deleted. It must, however, be confessed that the resulting pattern does not give much information of value. The strips vary very greatly in width, although quite a number, especially in the south-eastern area, are actually or nearly 80 feet wide. The closest approach to regularity occurs in the extreme south-eastern corner, where there is a self-contained block of strips, with a headland, on a different alignment from the rest of the field. Elsewhere some of the strips, as planned, may represent two or even three parallel strips of 80 ft. width, thrown into one.

On both sides of the main road a headland is usually visible, and it must once have been continuous, although recent agriculture has obliterated it in some places. Elsewhere headlands are less frequent and their place must have been taken by accommodation roads. This was a normal feature in an open field. Most of these roads were still in use in recent times, and it was possible to see how all the fields were originally reached by this means, although in some places their ends have now fallen into disuse. Gores occur only in two places, in the centre of the plan, but the regular lay-out of the field normally precludes the necessity of such a feature.

The writer has had the benefit of discussing the plan with Dr. and Mrs. C. S. Orwin. They do not attach any significance to the irregularity of the strips, since it is common to find that there has been consolidation by purchase or exchange, resulting in complete lack of uniformity. They consider this, on the evidence available, to be a clear case of an Open Field.